Mark your calendars, invite your friends, and plan to spend the day on Saturday, June 3, 2006, celebrating the 40th Anniversary of Bing Nursery School. We will have a research symposium from 9 a.m. to noon in the Department of Psychology in Jordan Hall. Then, in the afternoon, there will be a garden party reunion and open house at Bing from 2 to 4 p.m. During the morning session, faculty members who have conducted research at Bing will give an overview of their work. This is an opportunity for parents, teachers and students to hear about many of the now-famous studies the children have participated in throughout the years. In the afternoon, we invite children and families currently enrolled at Bing, as well as those who are “graduates” of Bing, prospective enrollees and former Stanford students and researchers to join us as we acknowledge our appreciation for our beautiful nursery school and research setting.

As we prepare for this event, we reminisce about the day in January, 1966, when J. E. Wallace Sterling, then president of Stanford University, and esteemed visitors gathered for the dedication of Bing Nursery School. Construction of the school had begun a year earlier with the founding director Dr. Edith M. Dowley outlining for the architects the plans for the building and grounds. She wanted to “give back to the children some of the things modern living had taken away from them.”

Dowley planned three spacious playrooms with a half-acre outdoor play area for each room. In working with the landscape architects, she made plans to bring in the earth to make the hills that have become so important to the children through the years. Trees, shrubs and vines that would bloom or drop pods or petals throughout the year were carefully planted in each room. A linear arbor was constructed for East Room and planted with wisteria to provide beauty, shade and a natural setting for swings. A redwood grove was planted in Center Room. A circular pergola and bridge were placed in West Room.

Attention was given to the windows and doors and the amount of light that came in. High ceilings in combination with spacious rooms were considered important because young children are always looking up at adults. Edith Dowley asked the designers and visitors to kneel on the floor and view the space the way children would experience it. There are windows that span from just above the floor to nearly the ceiling. High windows that display the changing sky at either end of the room also allow for cross-ventilation.

Emphasis was placed on the importance of the indoor-outdoor environment. Bing was designed to be a place that says to children, “Come on in, this is a place...”

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Following in their parents’ footsteps, a new generation has started to attend Bing. From left: Brett Schiller, ’72, with daughter Cate, ’07; Ollie Duncan, alumni parent and grandparent with grandson Tyler, ’08, (Tyler’s father Dale, ’71, not photographed); Amy Paulsen, ’71, with daughter Sybelle, ’08; Andrew Fetter, ’74, with son James, with daughter Cate, ’07; Ollie Duncan, alumni parent and grandparent with grandson Tyler, ’08, (Tyler’s father placed on providing children the oppor-
tunity to learn social skills and enhance their cognitive abilities by exploring the natural environment and interacting with each other under the guidance of skilled teachers.

Bing Nursery School was constructed with a grant from the National Science Foundation and a matching gift from Peter Bing and his mother, Anna Bing Arnold. It was designed as a laboratory for quantitative research in child development, a place for qualitative child study and a base for psychology classes, specifically Psychology 146, Observation of Children, and 147, Development in Early Childhood. Students from other psychology classes, including Developmental Psychology and Research Methods, also work in the school. Observers, researchers, and interns from linguistics, communication, education, product design, pediatrics, psychiatry, human biology and other university departments and programs have benefited from the opportunity to participate in the school, as well.

It is a long-honored tradition to maintain a child study laboratory at colleges and universities. Stanford’s schools began in 1949 at Stanford Village, where graduate students lived at that time. Edith Dowley directed that school for nearly 20 years, from the time she came from the University of Michigan to Stanford as a graduate student. A second site was established in the late 1950s in a cottage across from Bing and was called the Escondido Village Nursery School.

Dowley’s dream of designing a school that would truly be a haven for children became a reality when Bing opened in 1966, combining the two original schools in one setting. Dowley continued to direct the school and maintained her work as professor of psychology and education and as coordinator of the Master’s Program in Early Childhood Education until her retirement in 1975.

It was my privilege to know Dr. Dowley as my mentor when she recruited me in 1965, also from graduate school at Michigan, to be one of the first head teachers at Bing. Since my return to Bing as director in 1989, it has been a priority and a joy for me to continue the tradition of hiring and supporting a group of outstanding teachers who can meet the needs of hundreds of happy children each year.

During the past three years, Helen and Peter Bing have generously funded a beautiful renovation of our well-loved building and grounds. (See page 9.) This work brings back memories of the thrill of seeing the newly constructed Bing for the first time in 1965. We are grateful to Helen and Peter for this restoration, which ensures the continuous, effective use of our physical plant and grounds for years to come.

A laboratory school is a dynamic setting. It brings together teachers of young children, researchers and students who are training to work with children. Being a laboratory for child study means providing an outstanding nursery school where parents, teachers, students and researchers alike strive to discover and to employ the best ways to promote children’s learning and development. It encompasses an approach to curriculum that is open and experimental. Teachers think about how children learn and how to make sure children are thinking and solving problems as they play and explore. It is exciting to be involved in a laboratory setting and a challenge always to be looking at things afresh. The importance of teaching, and the integration of teaching and research, are at the heart of our mission. Our celebration allows us to rededicate Bing Nursery School to the spirit of scholarship for which it is so well known. Please join us on June 3.

The Bing Times is published annually by Bing Nursery School, Stanford University. Bing Nursery School is part of the Department of Psychology at Stanford University. It serves as a laboratory for research in child development and a site for training undergraduates.

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I’m writing. –Zeta W., 3 years 3 months

Photo not available online.
When most people walk to the Dish, they see the wonders of nature. But when Hazel Markus walks to the Dish, she sees human nature.

Or nurture, as the case may be.

Markus, an internationally renowned cultural psychologist, studies the subtle ways in which different cultures shape the way people think and act. On a hike to Stanford’s satellite dish with her 5-year-old niece last May, she witnessed half a dozen parent-child interactions that echoed her findings.

“These little interpersonal episodes were absolutely saturated with cultural assumptions about the right way to think, feel and behave,” Markus recalled. “And there were some real cultural differences in understandings about how to be a good parent and how to be a good child.”

The Stanford professor spoke May 31 to Bing School educators, parents and others who came to hear the school’s Distinguished Lecture of 2005, “Our Cultures, Our Children: The Influence of Culture on Children’s Development.”

Three of the Dish interactions reflected middle-class Euro-American values; three others showed the influence of Chinese, East Asian and Latino traditions. Many Americans would have no inkling which was which.

• A mom leaned over a stroller, handed a silent 3-year-old a juice drink and announced, “It’s hot. You must be thirsty.”
• Another mom leaned over a stroller and said to a drowsy 6-month-old, “We’ve seen three rabbits, two squirrels and now a hawk. Can you believe it? I wonder what we’ll see next! Hasn’t this been an exciting day?” The baby perked up a little.
• A 7-year-old ran up to his mother and grandmother and tried to get the younger woman’s attention. She said, “I don’t care how excited you are—you interrupt your grandmother when she’s speaking.”
• A dad, sounding exasperated, told his 18-month-old son, “Okay, now, you have a choice: either you wear this hat or we put on sunscreen. Which do you want?”

The child replied, “I want juice.”

• An older man bent down to a baby in a stroller and whistled at one ear, then the other, getting the baby to follow his sounds in a back-and-forth listening game.
• Pointing off to the distance, a father asked a 4-year-old, “What are those things, Carl?”
• The boy looked up and said, “The sky.”
• His father said, “No, no—what are those things? Those sort of brown things.”
• Silence. “Carl, those are the foothills. What are foothills, Carl?”
• More silence. “Carl, foothills are hills at the base of a larger mountain range.
• Now, do you remember what you saw last time we were in the foothills?”
• Finally, the boy replied: “A salamander.”
• His father said, “Carl, you are so smart. You know everything!”

For the most part, our cultural patterns are like the air we breathe: we don’t see them.

While those accustomed to diverse communities like the Bing School, where ethnic differences are sought and celebrated, might recognize the cultural roots of these scenarios, the convictions underlying the interactions are so deeply embedded in each culture that their powerful effects on child-rearing tend to go unrecognized, especially by those who hold them, Markus said.

The Air We Breathe

“Usually, when we talk about culture, we think about different kinds of foods, different festivals, and we all like to appreciate as much of that as we possibly can,” the researcher explained. “But the idea that our own cultural patterns are actually influencing the way we think, the way we feel, the way we act, is less obvious to us, because for the most part, they’re like the air we breathe: we don’t see them.”

Our own culture’s implicit assumptions may not become apparent to us until we compare them with those of other cultures and consider where the differences come from. Such comparisons are at the heart of Markus’s work.

Although our capacity for culture is humans’ great evolutionary advantage, the content of culture stems not from biology but from history, Markus emphasized. The behavioral differences she studies come from nurture, not nature. While it clearly affects our thinking, culture itself “is not something that’s inside people,” said Markus. “It’s out there in the world, in ideas, practices and artifacts.”

Markus’s cultural comparisons focus on sociocultural models of the self. These are differing patterns of ideas and practices about the right way to be a person. They exist both “in the head” (as thoughts, feelings and attitudes) and “in the world” (in the policies that animate schools, for instance, and the practices that are part of people’s daily lives).

“We tend to forget, in our middle-class and upper-middle-class European-American settings, that there are other ways of being,” Markus said. “There are many, many models of how to be a good self, and one of our goals is to try to figure them out, extract them from this collective reality so that we can begin to understand them and work with them.”

Two of the models she studies, “independent” and “interdependent,” characterize European-American and Asian cultures, respectively. These models exist as a kind of sociocultural yin and yang.

Standing Out

Euro-Americans tend to prize independence much more than interdependence, Markus explained. According to the independent model of the self, a person is fundamentally separate from others, an individual who should try to stand out.
Markus characterized the model as follows: “I’m independent, I’m in control, I’m free to choose based on my own preferences and needs, I’m successful and hardworking, I like myself, and I am this way not because of what my parents have done, and not because of my relations to others, but because of what’s inside me — some special attributes that I uniquely have.”

It makes sense, then, that parents influenced by this model would try to help young children recognize and “shape up” their personal preferences. “You’d want to make sure that kids know what they want, so you’d give them opportunities to express their preference and make lots of choices,” Markus said. “You’d want them to stand out, to express themselves. It’s also important [under this model] to feel good about oneself and to be in a state of excitement or high arousal.”

Thus, on her Dish walk, parents with Euro-American backgrounds (scenarios 2, 4 and 6) spoke profusely to children too young to answer back, with the idea that children should be at least thinking of an answer, readying themselves for self-expression. These parents also encouraged their children to make choices, to experience thrill and to think very highly of themselves.

Markus cited Penelope Leach (author of Your Baby and Child) as a trusted expert who vigorously sets forth an independent model as the only right way to raise children. “She says that from earliest infancy, everything about development depends on self-esteem,” Markus noted. “And if you’re going to succeed in a middle-class European-American world, that’s probably right. [But] she doesn’t write that this is the European and American middle-class model of how to be a person; she just says this is the way you should do it.”

Where does this model come from? Markus stressed that all sociocultural models of self are philosophically and historically grounded rather than empirically or evolutionarily based. In the United States, the independent model rests on a variety of building blocks, including ideas of personal liberty and pursuit of happiness, capitalism, the Protestant ethic, the American Dream, the individual working hard to reach the top.

Fitting In

Asian cultural traditions and practices often stand in stark contrast to those prominent in the United States or Europe. “If we move to an East Asian or South Asian cultural context,” Markus said, “the historical, philosophical and religious underpinnings are obviously very different — including, for example, lots of ideas from Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, ideas and practices of sympathy and compassion as well as hierarchy and filial piety.”

From a Japanese perspective, Penelope Leach’s advice would seem “the straightforward claim of a naked ego,” she said. The right way to express and enhance oneself in an Asian culture is to fit in, to promote harmony and calm, to feel what others are feeling. “This doesn’t mean that you give up your autonomy, but it does mean that you adjust yourself to others. It starts with the idea that we are fundamentally interdependent or relational.”

The Chinese mother at the Dish didn’t ask if her child was thirsty or offer any choices. “She just realized that it was hot, felt what the child was feeling and handed over the juice without making a conversational event of it,” Markus said. And the older man of East Asian descent initiated an entirely nonverbal interaction in which the baby responded reflexively by turning toward soft sounds he made.

Our Babies, Our Selves

Culture carves children from the time they are born, imposing society’s expectations even on newborns.

In many parts of Asia, for instance, children are considered to be bodily tied to their mothers. Chinese and Japanese moms thus tend to have more physical contact with their infants than do American mothers, maintaining the bond by co-sleeping, co-bathing and carrying the baby everywhere on their backs. Asians and Latinos are apt to see mother-infant separation as something akin to child abuse, while in the Euro-American tradition, “too much” bodily contact is taboo.

Markus explained the difference. “[Americans] take this little baby that comes home from the hospital, that’s been close to the mom all this time, and they put the baby in her own little bed, then move her down the hall into her own little room, all beautifully decorated, to sleep alone. What underlies this is the idea that they want to create a good little self; they want her to be independent. Whereas in Asia, what you take home is an asocial being, and you want to keep that baby very close to you and keep yourself in tune with that baby to show her how to be so that the child becomes a fully social, interdependent being.

“From a Japanese perspective, co-sleeping and co-bathing foster interdependency, diminish tensions between generations, between genders, lots of things. And in fact, the only people [in Japan] who really sleep alone are people in late adolescence or in late adulthood if they are widowed or living without children or grandchildren.”

Media Messages

Cultural imperatives about child rearing are powerfully reinforced in advertisements, news broadcasts, song lyrics, books and posters, Markus’s research shows. She displayed a Gerber’s ad showing a toddler trying to escape an adult’s grasping hand and proclaiming the company’s foods “a good source of
Do Asian individuals inherently think less of themselves? The answer was an emphatic no. Markus cited a questionnaire given to adults from different countries, in which North Americans of European descent scored higher than Japanese who had never gone abroad. (The Dutch scored by far the highest, surpassing only the French.) “When you first see this, you might think, ‘Oh my goodness, the poor Japanese, they don’t feel good about themselves—it must be a very repressive, restrictive culture,’” she said. “But think instead from this model’s perspective: they have very different ideas about the right way to be.

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‘Recognizing that we’ve got one way and that there are other viable ways is a huge step toward understanding and tolerance.’

In a Japanese context, ‘I am a person of worth’ is just not something you would say, although other people might say it about you.”

Significantly, when the same questionnaire was given to recent Asian immigrants, self-esteem scores climbed; among third-generation immigrants, they rose even higher. “So it’s nothing about being Asian that gives you lower levels of self-esteem; it’s which ideas you are engaging with. Once you become an immigrant you start to engage with the American model, and sure enough, your self-esteem goes up.

“In fact, with students who visit here for a year, we find that within six months they figure out the ‘right way’ to feel about themselves in order to succeed in an American context, and their scores on self-esteem go right up. Those who don’t figure it out don’t have a good time and go home.”

‘A Comprehensive Psychology’
East-West studies are just one axis of comparison, a natural focus for early research in cultural psychology because East Asia was one of the first sources of diversity in American graduate programs. Markus is now looking at models of self in other groups—comparing working-class with middle-class Americans, for instance, and exploring Latino, African-American, American Indian, West Indian and South Asian cultures. She is also comparing groups by gender, religion, occupation and region of country, looking for differences in patterns of attitudes and ideas.

Multicultural Stanford is fertile ground for her work, as evidenced by the range of cultures encountered by chance on a simple walk to the Dish. “One of the wonderful things about being in an environment like Stanford is that you do come up every day with people who have these other ideas. Often, they’ve been raised with other ideas and they’re struggling with the ones they see here,” Markus said.

In the long run, she and her colleagues are hoping to produce “a comprehensive psychology, not a partial one based on our own culture,” she said. “If you don’t understand the underlying models, you’re not going to understand lots of behavior that’s out there in the world. You just can’t look at a behavior and assume you know what it’s about; you have to know what’s motivating it.”

Self-awareness is another goal, with benefits that extend to parenting. “I think it’s useful to try to articulate to yourself your ideas about what is a good child and to talk in your family about what’s the right way to be, recognizing that there could be other ways and drawing attention to that.” Markus suggested, “And you need to pay attention to your context: what ideas are out there that your child is being exposed to?”

Ultimately, the goal of cross-cultural understanding is greater tolerance, acceptance, even peace. “Recognizing that we’ve got one way and that there are other viable ways is a huge step toward understanding and tolerance,” Markus said. “Hopefully we’ll begin to appreciate and use these many different ways of being a self, and hopefully they won’t come in conflict with each other once we begin to experience them.

“I mean, it’s a start. It’s something we can do—one thing.”
From ‘Bobo Dolls’ at Bing to Alleviation of Global Problems

By Chia-wa Yeh, Research Coordinator and Head Teacher

Bing Nursery School is the laboratory school for the psychology department at Stanford University. Since its inception in 1966, Bing has supported a robust body of scientific research on the development of young children. Sometimes parents ask what happens to all the research that takes place at Bing. One good example is the early work of renowned Stanford psychology professor Albert Bandura. His studies at Bing, conducted in the 1960s and 1970s, continue to have far-reaching influence in the United States and abroad.

Over the course of a long and extremely productive academic career, Bandura has maintained a close relationship with Bing Nursery School and currently serves on the Bing director’s advisory committee. He is also one of the professors from the Stanford psychology department who applied for the original grant from the National Science Foundation to build a laboratory nursery school for research purposes at Stanford. With this grant from the NSF and a matching gift from Peter Bing and his mother, Anna Bing Arnold, Bing Nursery School came to life!

Bandura developed one of the major theories in child development: social learning theory. It was a dramatic departure from both the behavioristic perspective, which regarded human behavior as shaped and controlled by the environment, and the psychodynamic perspective, which regarded people as being driven largely by unconscious impulses. In contrast, Bandura focused on the key role that individuals play in shaping their lives. He devised a more complex theory in which self-development and change are the product of an interplay between personal attributes, behavioral styles, and environmental influences.

From early on, Bandura was interested in the power of social modeling—both good and bad—in child development. He began his research when television was still new. Even then, many children’s programs contained substantial violence, and concerns arose about the effects on children. Findings from Bandura’s groundbreaking research, the so-called “Bobo doll” studies, figured prominently in the presidential commission on televised violence.

Bandura has also testified on the effect of televised violence numerous times before the Congress and the Federal Trade Commission regarding children’s modeling of hazardous feats in televised advertisements.

The modeling studies were conducted at the Stanford Village Nursery School, the predecessor of Bing Nursery School, in the early 1960s. At the time these studies began, it was widely believed that television violence was cathartic for viewers. Scholars claimed that vicarious exposure to violent programs could actually reduce aggression in viewers, including children. Bandura’s research showed exactly the opposite. It demonstrated that aggressive modeling fostered aggressive styles of behavior and reduced restraints over aggression.

In the 1970s, Bandura shifted his attention to some of the positive effects of exposure to prosocial modeling and its therapeutic effects. He designed a program, for example, to help children at Bing overcome fears of dogs through modeling of coping strategies and carefully designed guided-master experiences. This approach is now a standard treatment for phobias.

Bandura extended this research to adults who had suffered for decades from snake phobias. Success in overcoming years of phobic debility and tormenting nightmares was a liberating and transforming experience. They gained a sense of personal efficacy to overcome other obstacles in their lives. This finding spurred Bandura’s later research to gain a deeper understanding of believing one’s efficacy enables people to take a hand in shaping their life course.

Most recently, Bandura’s knowledge of social modeling is being used to alleviate some of the more urgent global problems. These include burgeoning population growth and the environmental devastation it produces, devaluation of women in societies in which they are marginalized, disallowed aspirations and denied their ability and dignity, and the AIDS epidemic.

Long-running serial dramas serve as the means to enable, motivate and guide people for personal and social changes that improve their life conditions. The dramatic productions portray people’s everyday lives and the impediments they face. They help viewers to see a better life and provide them with the strategies and incentives to take the steps to realize it. Many worldwide applications in Africa, Asia and Latin America are promoting national literacy, fostering family planning, raising the status of women and curbing the spread of the AIDS epidemic.

We often cite examples in the natural success where knowledge pursued for its own sake has unforeseen human benefits. The knowledge gained from the early modeling experiment at Bing some 40 years ago spawned unimagined global applications designed to alleviate major global problems.

In reflecting on his programs of research on social modeling, Bandura notes that the tragedy is not only the heavy commercial overdosing of viewers on violence, but the forfeiting of this powerful medium for human enlightenment and betterment.

Bandura’s work on modeling has also informed our teaching practices at Bing. Teachers model positive social interactions for young children every day, handling conflicts in ways that illustrate how children can solve similar problems in the future on their own. The mastery experiences we provide them help to build children’s belief in themselves during this important formative period.
Nearly 40 Years Later, A Bing Study Is Still Going

By Simon Firth, Writer and Bing Parent

How long can you resist a tempting treat? The answer may help determine your success in life.

Learning to delay gratification gives children an edge in coping with life’s challenges—an edge that lasts into adulthood. That was a key finding of a groundbreaking study that psychologist Walter Mischel conducted at Bing Nursery School.

Mischel’s so-called “marshmallow studies,” which ran between 1968 and 1974, are some of the most celebrated in the history of child development. They are also among the longest-running in the history of social science. Indeed, Mischel continues to work with the original group of 550 Bing children to this day.

At the outset, his main interest was to understand what makes it hard or easy for children to delay gratification. Would certain strategies enable children to forgo a treat in the hope of being given an even bigger one later, for example? To find out, Mischel developed a simple experiment. In one of Bing’s game rooms, a researcher met with a child and established a reward that the child would like—a marshmallow, perhaps, or a pretzel. Children were then offered one of the treats instead of one if they could wait for the researcher to leave and then re-enter the room before eating the treat. While the researcher waited right outside the door, the child was observed to see how well he or she could resist taking the single treat before the researcher came back.

It turned out that tactics such as removing the treat from view or redirecting the child’s attention made a big difference in how long children were able to wait. This finding was highly influential in suggesting techniques for helping children—and, indeed, adults—to master self-control. It also led Mischel to challenge some fundamental assumptions about the nature of personality.

Freudian theory held that personality was the manifestation of unconscious drives and wishes. Mischel’s “social-cognitive” approach suggested ways in which manifestations of personality, such as impulsivity, can be altered by actively thinking about a situation. Furthermore, it offered people a mechanism for altering situations that might otherwise overwhelm them, such as an inability to resist tasty food, by using self-regulating strategies such as distraction.

Having understood how children can develop an ability to delay gratification, Mischel and his colleagues got interested in a second question: Could that ability predict anything important later in the child’s life?

To find out, they gave all children in the Bing study scores that reflected how well they’d been able to spontaneously come up with strategies to delay gratification. The researchers then ran follow-up interviews every five years with as many of the students as possible.

It turned out, says Mischel, that one’s ability to delay gratification “is quite a significant predictor of a variety of important long-term outcomes.” One such outcome is doing well at school. Another is resiliency in later life against vulnerabilities such as being sensitive to rejection.

Mischel moved from Stanford to Columbia University in 1983. But he still follows up with the Bing participants to ask about changes in relationships, work and academic achievement since they were last contacted. Although he has lost contact with some individuals over the years due to address changes, the Bing group as a whole has been “superbly cooperative,” he notes. “This has become a very special group in the history of social science,” Mischel says of the former Bing students who made his study possible.

A new round of follow-up interviews with former Bing students from the “marshmallow studies” of the 1960s and ’70s is about to be launched by Mischel in collaboration with Oslem Ayduk, a psychology professor at UC-Berkeley. This is an opportunity for any of the “lost subjects” to become part of the study again. If you know any Bing graduates who may be in this category, they can learn more information on the follow-up studies of Bing alumni by contacting Dr. Mischel directly at WM@psych.columbia.edu.


Meet Beth Wise, Bing Music Specialist

Bing Music Specialist and Head Teacher Beth Wise rotates through the classrooms daily. She introduces new songs, helps children discover how to use instruments, explores movement through music and facilitates children’s songwriting and dramatic play. Wise provides an environment that stimulates creativity and helps develop an appreciation and love of music.

Wise maintains and acquires resources for teachers to use during music time, and also works with teachers to plan and extend their curriculum ideas for music activities.

“Music is a universal language for children,” says Wise, “and it brings a sense of joy to them as they sing and participate in musical activities. It’s also a great way to encourage children to work together as a group, as it stimulates their imagination and creativity.”
Simply Following Rules Isn’t So Simple
By Adrienne Gelpi Lomangino, Head Teacher

Most parents and teachers of preschool-age children have probably observed that just because children can repeat a rule does not mean they will act on that rule. For example, a 3-year-old runs in from outside and is asked, “What do you need to do inside?” After replying, “Walk,” the child then runs down the hallway. Children’s understanding of rules, and their ability to act on these rules, are central to the research of psychology professor Natasha Kirkham.

Kirkham’s efforts to uncover children’s understanding of rules have focused on their actions during two sorting activities. One task, the Dimensional Change Card Sort, is a game in which participants sort cards by shape or by color into two boxes. Each card displays one of two shapes (e.g., a truck or a star), and the color can be either of two colors (e.g., blue or red). The children are asked to play either the “color game” or the “shape game,” sorting the cards into separate bins according to color or shape.

After sorting about six cards, she asks the child to switch games. So, if children have been playing the “color game,” she tells them that now they are going to play the “shape game” and that all the cards should be sorted by shape. When asked where the trucks go and where the stars go, children point to the correct bins, showing they know the rules for the new game. However, once children are presented with an actual card to sort, they reveal that saying a rule and acting on it are different things. Although they know the rules have changed, younger children continue sorting by the previous rule. It doesn’t matter whether they played the “color game” or the “shape game” first; 3-year-olds continue to sort by the first dimension while playing the second game. Studies repeatedly reveal a clear shift over the preschool years in children’s capacity to adapt to this change in rules.

While 3-year-olds typically continue to sort by the first rule, 5-year-olds can make the cognitive shift and use the current rule.

What causes the 3-year-olds so much difficulty with this task? One possibility is that they cannot keep two sets of rules in mind at the same time. Variations of the task reveal that under different circumstances, they can handle rules that involve two different dimensions. For example, if children sort by color (e.g., red and blue) and then are asked to sort by shape, but these shapes are entirely new colors (e.g., yellow and green), then young preschoolers can successfully switch from sorting by color to shape. However, if the shape changes but the colors remain the same, they continue to sort by color.

Kirkham proposes that perhaps the demands on attentional control, rather than memory, lead to children’s difficulties with the sorting task. Once 3-year-olds focus on a particular aspect of the card, their attention gets stuck there, a phenomena she describes as attentional inertia.

A second task Kirkham has used for years in her research is called the Day-Night Stroop task. This involves two types of cards: one is black with a picture of a moon; the other is white with a picture of a sun. The researcher shows the participant each card and instructs the child to say “day” in response to the card with the moon and “night” when shown the card with the sun. While children ages 3 1/2 to 4 1/2 find this task very difficult, children ages 6 to 7 find it quite easy.

Through manipulations of this task, Kirkham has similarly demonstrated that children’s difficulties using rules to guide their actions are not immutable. Follow-up studies by Kirkham and colleagues support the idea that young children’s difficulties lie in shifting attention from a characteristic of the image that was initially relevant and refocusing on a newly relevant characteristic.

In a variation of the Day-Night Stroop task, the researcher sang a brief ditty—“Think about the answer, don’t tell me”—before the child placed the card in a sorting bin. The ditty was intended to encourage the child to take more time before responding. Four-year-olds performed better with the ditty than without it.

Four-year-olds also performed well if they were asked to say a word unrelated to the picture on the card. That is, when Kirkham and colleagues instructed children to say “pig” when shown the moon and “dog” when shown the sun, they performed better than when asked to say “day” when shown the moon and “night” when shown the sun.

In most of these studies, children’s responses are either right or wrong: either they put the card in the correct bin, or they do not. Kirkham notes that this dichotomous view of children’s responses does not provide insight into children’s process of developing inhibitory control and overcoming attentional inertia.

In ongoing analyses, Kirkham and her colleagues are taking a closer look at the transition in children’s sorting performance. They are examining eye movements and response times for indications of children’s thinking. Do children immediately place the card in a particular bin? Do they look back and forth between bins before selecting one? Do they take longer to choose, as though deliberating, before they start consistently sorting the cards correctly? Such detailed examinations of children’s actions will help us understand how children shift from knowing the rules to actually acting on their knowledge.
Bing Renovation Project

The extensive three-year renovation of Bing Nursery School is near completion. With generous support from Helen and Peter Bing, the renovation—first in 40 years—began in the summer of 2001. The project started with the restoration of all the gardens and play yards throughout the school and then moved on to the patio, kitchen, bathroom, classrooms and research rooms.

The most recent renovations have been to the offices, the teacher workroom and the hallway to the Two’s class. Most notable is the Eric Carle hallway, which leads to the Two’s room. Carle’s colorful prints are a warm welcome for children and adults who travel this hall daily.

Above: Helen Bing, right, and Jennifer Winters, assistant director, admire the art in the Eric Carle hallway. From far left, clockwise: Director Jeanne Lepper in her newly renovated office. Nancy Verdziel, left, Bing librarian/teacher, and teacher Meghan Olsen discuss books in the teacher workroom. Bing parent, Linda Lee, looks at an Eric Carle print by the Two’s door with son Jackson. Below: Office staff in the beautifully renovated main office.
How to Talk to Children: Bing Teachers Offer Tips and Hints

By Simon Firth, Writer and Bing Parent

Spend time in any Bing classroom and you’ll notice the remarkable serenity that pervades the room. A class can be bustling, full of laughter and song—even energetic hammering—and yet it remains fundamentally calm.

Unlike at home, things hardly ever get out of control at Bing. Arguments and tantrums are fleeting and few. Teachers keep children focused on the myriad possibilities of learning through play.

Spend a little more time in the class and you’ll discover a key reason for this atmosphere: the very particular and deliberate ways in which Bing teachers communicate with their students. Their methods for engaging with children, encouraging play and inviting children to explore the world with each other often differ from the default tendencies of many parents.

This spring, Bing parents learned more about these methods and the philosophies behind them at a seminar titled “How to Talk to Children: Tips and Hints from Bing Teachers in Supporting Your Child’s Development.” Several staff offered ideas for promoting effective communication, talking about feelings, solving social problems and talking with children about the child’s work.

Listening First

The April seminar, repeated in early May with a slightly different roster of teachers, began with a look at some basic techniques for improving parent-child communication.

Center AM teacher Karen Robinette spoke first about the value of listening. Children need to feel listened to, she said, and need time to formulate responses in a conversation. They also benefit tremendously from regular “floor time,” when a parent gets down on their level, makes eye contact and converses about what they’re interested in, not what the parent wants to say. “Try to let your child take the lead,” said Robinette.

Children just starting to speak benefit from having their actions simply narrated back to them as they play. Robinette convincingly illustrated this with a video clip of Two’s teacher Quan Ho narrating as a boy progressed across a climbing structure. At the end, the boy joyfully added his own narration: “Down we go!”

Although parents shouldn’t correct a young child’s grammatical mistakes, they can model the correct phraseology. Robinette added. They can also model polite behavior, such as saying hello and goodbye to people throughout the day.

Parents need to watch how they formulate their own statements, too. Children respond better, for instance, to positive guidance than to a litany of things they can’t do. At the same time, limits need to be well articulated. “Don’t offer a choice when there isn’t one!”

Robinette advised.

Speaking about Feelings

Head Teacher Parul Roy, also from Center AM, spoke next about talking with children about feelings.

“Behind every behavior is a feeling,” explained Roy. “So when you are responding to an action you need to understand the feeling behind it.”

By separating feeling from behavior, parents can also get children to behave appropriately and still be emotionally supportive, Roy suggested. “We should accept all feelings, but not all behaviors,” she argued.

Children need to know that it’s okay to be angry or anxious, for example, but they also need parents to be clear about how they can and can’t express those emotions (i.e. not by biting or hitting).

Knowing your child very well, and thus anticipating his or her mood changes as they get hungry or tired, can go a long way toward ameliorating an intense emotional situation, said Roy. However, she argued that parents also need to accept and respect their child’s feelings and give them plenty of room for (appropriate) expression.

Parents also need to beware of placing an adult agenda on what a child says, Roy added. If a child doesn’t want to go and play at a friend’s house, don’t make assumptions about why that’s so. It may be nothing to be concerned about, and it’s not worth trying to force them to come up with a reason that you see as valid. “Give it some time before you jump in,” Roy suggested.

Parents can help younger children articulate and define feelings the children may not have words for. And all parents need to remember that when it comes to responding to feelings, no child is going to be able to respond as a parent would wish every time—and parents may not always respond in a way that is best for their child.

It’s important, Roy said, to remember you can always revisit an incident and talk about how you both might deal with a similar situation next time.

Talking Through Problems

Problematic social situations are among the hardest for preschoolers to deal with, and also among the hardest for adults to know how to resolve. For instance, when disputes break out between children, it’s easy for an adult to take sides or to come up with solutions that only seem to make things worse.

Knowing the right things to say in such situations can make things a lot better, argued West AM teacher Nandini Bhattacharjya (whose place was taken by Peckie Peters, Head Teacher of West AM, the following week).

Bhattacharjya advised parents that they can stop a lot of problems before they ever happen by anticipating a problem. “Suggest that your child put their most precious toys away before a playdate, for example,” she said.

She also explained the value of
talking with children in order to set clear, consistent limits and expectations for both their social interactions and their behavior in general. If a child is expected to wash her hands before a meal, said Bhattacharjya, she should always be expected to do it.

Young children aren’t always ready to problem solve, so they may need help, Bhattacharjya added. They may need suggestions for how best to resolve a dispute, for example. And while adults should always acknowledge a child’s feelings (“I know you really want to go outside in the rain with no shoes”), at times the best solution is simply to redirect their attention to something else.

**Problem Solving in Action**

In a remarkable piece of video, teacher Betsy Koning of East AM was captured putting some of these ideas into action.

Two girls in East room had come to her to complain about the behavior of three boys in the playhouse. Koning immediately defused the situation by kneeling down to their level and asking all of the children for their point of view. When they had all made their opinions clear, she was firm about what behavior was acceptable or not, and then canvassed the children for how best to resolve the dispute.

It turned out that there were two problems to resolve. The boys were playing the girls, which they quickly agreed to stop when the girls made it clear they didn’t want to be a part of that game. Then the three boys had a dispute among themselves about who could play Meghan Olsen from East AM walked the audience through the stages of Koning’s intervention (a role that West PM Head Teacher Tom Limbert took over at the second meeting).

Olsen pointed out how Koning had used a clear and confident voice but had not been judgmental. She had first defused the situation, then had quickly identified the issue and drawn all the children into a search for a solution. She’d also focused on the behavior and not the child. After the solution had been agreed upon, Koning had stuck around to support the new play and make sure everything was happening as all the children had agreed it would.

**Talking About Art**

When parents pick up their children at Bing and collect a piece of art, their most common response is: “That’s beautiful; what is it?”

In the seminar’s final presentation, Head Teacher Adrienne Lomangino suggested that such comments, however well intentioned, are not the best way to talk to children about their work.

While it’s wonderful to be authentically interested in your child’s work, Lomangino argued, parents need to understand that the child may not have been trying to do anything particularly representational. At this age they get a lot of pleasure simply from exploring the qualities of the medium (paint, or collage, or clay, for example) rather than from trying to create anything in particular.

“Acknowledge their effort, and help them see the connection between their effort and their accomplishment. But try to avoid judgments and labeling,” she advised. “Focus on the process rather than the product.”

Responding to everything a child makes as “beautiful” is not only to risk devaluing the meaning of praise for them, but can also be beside the point. “Their purpose may not have been to create something beautiful,” Lomangino said.

A better way to talk with a child about their art, she suggested, is to ask open ended questions such as: “Tell me about your painting.”

If you want to be specific, said Lomangino, “talk in the language of art. Ask about the colors, materials and tools they used. If it’s a painting, talk about texture, color, balance and movement.”

“If a painting is labeled as something, you can use that as a starting point for a conversation,” she said. “But take your cues from them.”

**Parent Questions**

After the teacher presentations, there was time on both nights for questions.

One parent asked what to do when you need a child to do something important, such as act in a safe way, but they aren’t receptive. The suggested answer: acknowledge how they are feeling and then deflect the intensity (perhaps saying, “Do you need a hug?”) and then talk about how they can help do what you need them to do.

Several people wanted to know how to deal with a child who’s said she’d like to learn a skill, such as swimming, but then stops wanting to go to the lessons. The response: try acknowledging that it is hard to learn something new, then recall with them how they’ve felt the same way before and remember how that feeling changed once they mastered the new skill. Parents should also be careful not to over-schedule children with activities, the teachers felt. It may be that this sort of reluctance comes from a child who needs to have more down time to just be by himself.

Another parent asked what to do if you try to engage your child after school and they don’t want to talk. One idea was to let them get some rest and then try again later. Another suggestion was to try different phrasing. Rather than asking, “I see you went in the sand today,” which doesn’t invite much more than a “yes” response, try: “How did you get your pants so dirty?” That invites the child to tell as much of a story as they feel like sharing.

And what if your child tells you that they know something for a fact that you know is not true, such as, “I know broccoli is not good for you!”? For this a fellow parent in the audience had the answer. They’d had the same problem and had turned the family dispute into an opportunity to learn about research. The parent found a handy reference book on nutrition and read the child broccoli’s highly complimentary entry.

The Bing Parent Seminar Series is made possible through the generosity of Bing parents Violet and Evan Brooks.
The Tree Project: A Center Room Collaboration

By Nancy Howe, Head Teacher

Center Room has its mulberry trees and a shady redwood grove. East and West have arbors of wisteria. And every fall, outside the Two’s classroom, the spreading zelkova seems to burst into flame.

Trees are everywhere at Bing, a living legacy left nearly 40 years ago by Edith Dowley, the school’s founding director. Dowley understood the importance of bringing children into contact with the natural world. She thoughtfully designed the expansive play yards to include rolling hills, spacious sand pools and a mix of evergreens and deciduous trees. Determined to plant “one tree for each child,” she chose specimens that would brighten or blossom at different times of year so that children could witness the subtle changes of California seasons.

Last autumn, to honor our trees, the children, parents and teachers of Center AM and PM collaborated on an investigation of trees called The Tree Project. Weaving the study of trees into all areas of the fall-quarter curriculum, teachers followed the children’s interests, offering support and inspiration along the way.

Autumn naturally brings with it a dramatic awareness of trees. The children noticed the first leaves falling from the mulberry trees standing sentry along the patio in Center Room. They collected the yellow mulberry leaves, as well as pinecones from the redwoods and seedpods from the liquid-amber trees. In the redwood grove, they raked pine needles into piles and climbed ladders to look carefully under bark for bugs.

As their interest grew, children proposed theories about trees. Teachers recorded their theories (“Roots help so trees won’t fall down,” “Trees don’t sleep because they don’t have eyes”) and brought in books to answer questions and expand their knowledge. Jana Dilley of Canopy Trees for Palo Alto and Stanford grounds supervisor Steve Kaupas came to share their knowledge of trees. Children, too, began to share what they learned—identifying, for instance, the trees in their yards at home.

Teachers developed tree-related activities in every area of the curriculum from math to music.

Mathematical awareness was enhanced, for instance, with the counting and mapping of trees. Children also played games matching leaves with trees and sorted leaves, pine cones and twigs by shape and size. They weighed pinecones, measured tree circumferences and guessed at tree height. They visited other classrooms to observe different trees and to identify and collect leaves.

Incorporating trees into dramatic play in the sand area, children baked fallen ornamental apples into their sand cakes and created pretend apple trees by planting gathered sticks. They built a life-size tree with the help of Bing resident carpenter Wilhelm Grotheer, stuffing its frame with dried leaves and pine needles and covering it with paper which they painted brown. Beth Wise, Bing’s music teacher, introduced songs about trees, then led the children on musical parades all around the school to sing to their favorite trees. The children became aware that wooden musical instruments were made from trees. Some even made their own guitars at the woodworking table using scrap wood and rubber bands.

For snack time, the children prepared treats from tree products—fruits, spices, bark and sap—including cinnamon and maple syrup! Parents participated by bringing in homegrown persimmons from their persimmon trees to make persimmon cookies, as well as a baby olive tree to accompany bread dipped in olive oil.

Story time featured books, songs, finger plays and action rhymes with trees as their focus. In the art area, children painted pinecones, made leaf rubbings and constructed their own paintbrushes out of dried pine needles. They took clipboards, paper and pencils outdoors to draw trees they observed, and painted fantasy trees from their imagination.

By winter quarter, the trees had lost most of their leaves. The children commented on the transformation. “The leaves grow back on branches, but not today,” one child wistfully observed.

But spring comes early to California! In mid-February, the children noticed the first buds appearing on the mulberry leaves. Teachers ordered silkworm eggs to be hatched and raised in the classroom. Before long, children were feeding fresh mulberry leaves to tiny silkworms and watching them grow, spin their cocoons and emerge as white moths.

Now, as the mulberry leaves in Center Room are yellowing once again, Edith Dowley’s vision for the children of Bing Nursery Schol is evident and deeply appreciated.

Photo not available online.
“Genuine questions…mark the turning point when the act of teaching may become, simultaneously, an act of research.”

Trees are not alive.” A short comment from a single child sparked a wealth of imaginative speculation during snack time one day in the midst of last fall’s Tree Project. (See facing page.) Teacher Rinna Sanchez-Baluyut was reading the group a book called A Tree Is Nice by Janice May Udry when 4-year-old Brandt made his assertion.

Sanchez-Baluyut stopped and asked, “Why do you think trees are not alive?” The ensuing dialogue was full of inquiry and reflection.

**BRANDT:** Because they’re stuck on the ground.

**MILES:** Yeah, they don’t move.

**GEORGIA:** Yes, they do … they sprout.

**VERA GRACE:** No, they’re not alive.

**MAGGIE:** They’re alive because the leaves are falling off them.

Sanchez-Baluyut then asked, “What do you think is alive? Are people alive?”

**BRANDT:** Yes, because we move and we have eyes and legs.

**MILES:** Yes, people are alive. They have feet to walk.

“Are cars alive?” asked Sanchez-Baluyut. “They move.”

**BRANDT:** Mmmm…no, because they don’t walk—they drive.

The teacher tossed out another challenge: “Are tables alive? Tables have legs.”

**BRANDT:** No, because they don’t have feet to walk on the bottom.

Next she said, “Are dogs alive?”

**MILES:** Yes, because they have feet to walk on the grass.

And then she asked, “Is the grass alive?”

**MILES:** No, because they’re stuck on the ground.

**BRANDT:** Sharks are alive. Whales are alive. They can go out of the water and get air. Letters aren’t alive, because they don’t have fins.

**MILES:** Or eyes, and ears and nose.

Later, additional children shared their theories.

**MEI-MEI:** Trees are alive because they grow.

**JASMINE:** No, trees are not alive because they’re trees and trees are never alive.

**BRIANA:** They’re not alive because they don’t have a mouth. They don’t talk … maybe they died.

**JUSTIN P.:** No, they’re not alive because they can’t move.

**MICHAEL S.:** Yes, they are alive because they’re real.

**NICHOLAS G.:** Yes, they’re alive because they have roots. The roots help it hold.

**DANIEL:** I think that trees are alive because they grow and they grow things. It’s alive because only things that live are born.

The episode was an exciting revelation of children’s ability to formulate ideas, articulate their points of view and consider the theories of their classmates. The children used words to paint pictures that captured the essence of their thinking. This verbal imagery illuminated the familiar experiences from which they constructed their theories.

The conversations were rich in child-to-child communication, yet the teacher was hardly passive. From the start, Sanchez-Baluyut recognized the potential of an “ordinary” moment and provided room for dialogue, appreciating the complexity of the children’s thinking. She ventured guesses about their questions and prompted further exploration. She helped them zero in on key ideas by raising questions that shifted the focus back to earlier points.

“If a child asks a why question and you [merely] turn it back to the child, you have a good chance of reducing the number of why questions that child will ask in the future,” writes early childhood educator Alise Shafer in Teaching and Learning: Collaborative Exploration of the Reggio Emilia Approach (Fu, Victoria, Stremmel, Andrew, and Hill, Lynn. Prentice Hall, 2002). “After all, he did ask a question and wants some level of help. A child might enter a wondering phase with you, but he does not want to do it all by himself.”

The tree dialogue exemplified fruitful collaboration between a teacher and her students. By posing well-chosen questions, subtly steering the dialogue and later researching the topic with her class, Sanchez-Baluyut spurred the children to reflect on their assumptions and respond to each other’s theories, stretching their thinking and expanding their knowledge.

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Even 4-year-olds can resolve their own conflicts with the support of a skilled teacher or parent. A memorable case in point occurred at Bing when a play date turned sour and the children devised a creative solution, putting a fresh twist on the notion of “acting out.”

The altercation arose in the park one morning before school. Two girls, ages 4 and 5, couldn’t agree on a game to play together, and their play date ended abruptly as one of them walked away. The younger girl felt rejected. When she entered the classroom a few hours later, she was anxious to describe the incident to a trusted teacher. The teacher listened respectfully, then called a meeting of both parties to discuss what had happened. Each child presented her side of the story, as well as the feelings involved. The teacher recapped the problem aloud, validated each girl’s feelings, and urged them to use this new information and insight to come up with a mutually acceptable solution. She mediated as the children discussed and rejected a number of different solutions.

Finally, the 4-year-old exclaimed, “I know—we can write a play!”

The teacher wasn’t sure how that would solve the problem, but she went along with it, jotting down a script dictated by the child. Once the play—titled “The Girl That No One Wanted to Play With”—was written, the young author specifically invited her companion from that morning to take part in the performance. With the teacher facilitating and serving as narrator, they and several others enacted the play before a group of interested peers.

The Girl That No One Wanted to Play With

NARRATOR: Once upon a time, three queens were playing in the castle. Then a dragon came. The dragon put the castle on a cloud. The queens were blowing [being blown across the sky] with the castle.

LONELY GIRL: Can I play?

QUEEN 1: No, because we are blowing on a cloud way, way up to the moon.

NARRATOR: Lonely Girl felt sad, and she felt angry, and she felt like she had a little owie in her heart. Then the fairies came and solved the problem.

FAIRY 1: Why don’t you find something else to do and ignore it? That means try to forget about it.

LONELY GIRL: Thank you, I don’t like that idea. That doesn’t make me feel better.

FAIRY 2: I learned something important. Do to others what you will want them to do to you. I know—let’s invite Lonely Girl to play with us.

NARRATOR: Then the queens wanted to play too, and the fairies said yes. So everyone went off to play together. Then the fairies started to like the girl that no one wanted to play with, so they gave her a flower.

LONELY GIRL: I am feeling happy now.

• • •

When the performance was over, the two girls who had argued that morning went off to play in the sand area—together. In everyone’s eyes, the problem was solved.

Clearly, this imaginative exercise offered much more than just a chance to perform. It defined the problem in a format that both girls could accept. It also gave the children a safe context in which to express a possible solution. Perhaps most important, it allowed the girls to experience each other’s roles in the conflict. Interestingly, the one who took the part of the...
problem-solving mediator, Fairy 2, was the 4-year-old who had felt rejected in that morning. The role reversal gave her a chance to feel in control, while her playmate, who chose the part of Lonely Girl, experienced how it felt to be excluded.

As teachers and parents seeking to develop socially adjusted human beings, our own role is to develop strategies that encourage children to communicate positively and effectively. The Bing environment is set up to promote social experiences, and the conflicts that inevitably arise offer rich opportunities for children to become adept at social problem-solving. The curriculum encourages children to discuss alternative solutions, show empathy toward others and build coping skills to work through frustrating interpersonal conflicts.

Our ability, as teachers and parents, to verbalize in a positive manner supports our children as they think through—and talk through—social problems. For this reason, all social problem-solving at Bing involves teacher input via verbal modeling. Teachers give children the opportunity and time to discuss the issue, propose ideas that will help them work through the problem, listen to and consider each other’s point of view, and carry out agreed-upon solutions.

To explore social problems verbally, children must build a vocabulary that enables them to participate effectively in such discussions. First-time visitors to the Bing classrooms may, in fact, be struck by the amount of verbalization between children and teachers. To a casual observer, the mode of communication may appear to be a general “chit-chat,” but to the sensitive ear it is a focused dialogue that engages both parties in the thinking process.

In verbally modeling appropriate problem-solving for children, teachers and parents have four crucial components to consider: vocabulary, developing children’s empathy, timing actions strategically, and listening to and validating feelings.

**Empathy**

In order to empathize with others, children need to recognize, think about and discuss their own feelings. Initially, they may need help in labeling their feelings. Adults can assist with clarifying observations: “It looks like you are mad right now.” “I get frustrated, too, when that happens.” “Sometimes I cry when I am sad.” “When you scream like that, I know you are angry.” “I smile when I feel happy.”

**Timing**

Talking about a feeling in the heat of the moment helps children to become aware of their emotions, but too much information can make a child more frustrated. Clearly labeling the behavior, then redirecting the focus, helps children develop self-regulating skills. “I get frustrated, too, when I can’t fit the small Lego pieces together—how can I help you?” “Sometimes I cry when I am sad—how can I help you feel better?” “When you scream like that, I know you are angry. Next time you feel like this, you can tell me you are angry, rather than scream.”

**Validating**

Listening patiently and respectfully, without needless interruption, is a challenge for many adults, but every child in a social conflict needs and deserves to be heard. Afterward, strategic questioning can validate and clarify children’s needs and feelings, as well as hint at solutions. “Why do you think she hit you?” “How do you feel when she hits you?” “How does that make you feel?” “How do you think that makes him/her feel?” “How would you feel if that happened to you?” “Are you okay?” “Can you ask her if she is okay?” “What happened when you both pulled the doll?” “What do you think will happen if you stack the blocks any higher?” “What happened last time the blocks fell down?”

Helping children recognize and verbalize feelings, empathize with peers and understand the consequences of their actions is at the heart of the Bing philosophy.
Passing Notes and Signing Words at Snack Time
By Adrienne Geli Lomangino, Head Teacher

The first note delivered to the Blue Triangle Snack Table during the second week of school read:

Dear Teacher
Adrienne’s Table,
Why are you writing? What are you doing? What are you eating? What are you writing? I love you.

The message was signed (in varying forms of writing) by everyone at the Purple Diamond Snack Table.

Children at the Blue Triangle Table were making pencil drawings before having snack. This caught the attention of the children at the Purple Diamond Table, prompting teacher Christina Davis to suggest that they write a letter to ask about it.

An exchange of notes ensued, often involving requests for food. Danny, for instance, asked for some pear, noting that the tray at the Purple Diamond Table did not include this favorite snack of his. When teacher Adrienne Lomangino read the note aloud, her group gathered up their few remaining pear slices, and a child delivered them to Danny’s table.

All the notes carried authentic inquiries prompted by genuine questions. Children could have simply called out their questions, but the teachers had pointed out that the other group might be in the middle of talking about something else, and that a note would allow them to respond when the opportunity arose instead of interrupting their snack conversation. In this way, the messages reinforced social awareness. The exchanges also drew attention to literacy by giving teachers a natural opportunity to model writing and by encouraging the children themselves to write (each table member wanted to sign the note).

Words can take many different forms, the children soon discovered. In further snack-time conversations, Davis deftly introduced her table to some sign language, using the hand gestures for milk, water and apple. Lomangino, too, modeled the signs for milk and water. The children immediately picked up the sign for milk: closing the fist as if milking a cow. The sign for water was more challenging: touching the thumb to the smallest fingertip while extending the middle three fingers to make a W next to the signer’s mouth.

Cognitively, discussing and trying out signs expanded the children’s experiences with symbolic representation. Physically, signing promoted their fine motor control and manipulation skills, while providing an outlet for their energy while sitting at the snack table. Noting these benefits, the teachers decided to incorporate signs into the snack time routine as long as the children remained interested.

As soon as Lomangino wondered aloud what else they might want to sign, her table suggested words from the immediate environment and from their experiences. Some guessed at the signing gestures as well—saying, for instance, “I think this is the sign for jumping.” As new inquiries arose, she first tried to find the answers in a children’s sign language dictionary. Although the pictures sparked interest learning even more words, they were difficult to interpret. Examining one instructional image, Scott announced, “You need three hands!”

When the dictionary proved insufficient, the children suggested asking Davis instead:

Dear Purple Diamond Table,
How do you sign banana? What’s the sign for graham crackers? What’s the sign for cubby?

From the Blue Triangle Table (with names signed below)
Someone from the Purple Diamond Table delivered the following response:

Dear Blue Triangle Table,
Navya and Danny and Matthew can show you how to sign banana. Natalie and Taerim and Maliyah can show you how to sign graham cracker. Teacher Christina has a book with a lot of signs in it in her cubby. You guys can borrow it. We don’t know the sign for cubby.

From the Purple Diamond Table (with names signed below)

Difficulties interpreting the signing dictionary, and the fact that it did not include many school-related words such as cubby, spurred the class to make its own dictionary. The intent here was not so much to teach signing as to engage children to think about alternative ways of expressing themselves during snack time. The class created a book with pictures of children signing and written descriptions of the hand positions. As both children and teachers expanded their signing skills, they added new pages to the book, building up from single terms like “apple” to sentences like “Please pass apple.”

Attempts to make requests using limited signing vocabulary soon led to opportunities for humor through wordplay, as phrases like “Please pass pear” became “Please pass baby bear” and “Please pass red shoes.” Who knew the benefits of signing would include such comic value?
Everett says goodbye to his mom and heads out to the woodworking table. A teacher is in view but doesn’t move in too closely as Everett selects a piece of wood from the basket. He carefully inspects the assortment of nails and chooses one of medium length. At this point, he stops and looks around. Spying the teacher, he smiles.

“Do you need some help?” the teacher asks, and Everett nods.

“What would you like me to do?” The teacher comes closer to the table.

Everett hands him a pair of needle-nose pliers and asks, “Can you hold it?” The teacher holds the nail with the pliers while Everett hits it several times with the hammer, using small, slow, controlled movements, firmly holding the hammer close to its head.

“You can let go now,” he says to the teacher, but continues to hammer. After several minutes he stops and “tests” the nail by wiggling it. Seeing that it is not moving, Everett smiles to himself. He chooses another nail and begins the process again.

Woodworking for 3-year-olds? Are we crazy?

Not at all. Young children learn best when they can manipulate materials, try things out and repeatedly practice the same skills. Using tools with wood is a challenging and satisfying experience that helps them develop fine-motor control and eye-hand coordination while productively focusing their energy. Through woodworking, children develop competence and confidence, acquire and use precise vocabulary, and learn to work safely and cooperatively in a group of their peers.

Like other curriculum areas, the woodworking table is set up with careful consideration for safety, skill level and interest. Spaces for four to six children are stocked with enough tools that each child can use one at a time. On days when interest is high, waiting lists are created to ensure that all children will have enough space and time to work. Tools are introduced one at a time, beginning with the hammer. Children learn to name its parts, to hold it correctly and to use it for the purpose for which it was designed.

Children new to the area familiarize themselves with the tools and materials, repeating an activity several times to develop competence. It is common for children to spend significant time selecting a piece of wood and devote 10 to 20 minutes hammering in one nail, only to leave the project at school at the end of the day instead of taking it home. Often, simply controlling and working with the materials is more satisfying for children than the end product.

Success with materials motivates children to try more challenging tasks. After the exploration stage, children often choose to combine pieces of wood or other materials. They also begin to name the products they create.

Children may practice a long time before they move into the representational phase, where they actually plan what they will make. Paulo, a frequent participant at the woodworking table, announced one morning that he was going to create a jaguar. He proceeded to create an animal using nails for teeth, and rubber bands and a hinge to make a mouth that would open and close.

Providing items that stimulate interest can draw children with experience and competence to challenge themselves further. For this purpose, we provide bits of foam, corks, bottle caps, pipe cleaners and other intriguing objects.

Matthew spotted a piece of straw one day and decided it would make a perfect antenna for his walkie-talkie. He asked a teacher to help while he stood his wood piece upright and hammered the nail into the straw. He then used a marker to add numbers to the front of his piece of wood, and his dramatic-play prop was ready.

The cognitive experience of woodworking is also valuable. Children acquire science and
Discovering Rocks
By Beverley Hartman, Head Teacher

“T

I

saw every red rock from here to Kansas!” exclaimed teacher Sue Gore on the first day of school last fall after returning from her summer road trip. Her newfound enthusiasm for rocks sparked a classroom journey that lasted all year.

Gore had thoughtfully collected a variety of rocks and brought in a children’s book with engaging prose and beautiful photographs, If You Find a Rock by Peggy Christian. The East AM team decided to set up a “provocation” at the discovery table with interesting rocks, images and books for the children to inspect. The children noticed the rocks right away, holding them and commenting on colors, patterns, shapes, weights and sizes. Picking up on the children’s fascination, the team brainstormed ideas for presenting this natural material as a curriculum topic. After identifying opportunities for innovation as well as for expanding ongoing activities, East AM started their journey: discovering rocks.

The discovery began with a two-tiered erosion table designed by teacher Quan Ho and built by carpenter Wilhelm Grotheer. The table was positioned on a hillside in the sand so that the children could build a landscape with pebbles, stones, rocks and sand. Water pushed the materials, and the children observed, changed elements and experimented with the process of erosion. Creating their own scientific method, they made predictions, described changes in the environment and drew conclusions based on their investigations. Statements by the children over a several-week period indicate their engagement and level of thinking:

ANDREW Z.: The river tumbles rocks to the ocean and knocks the edges off.
ASHLYN: It [a white pebble] looks like a tooth.
BEN: Water is melting the mountains… it’s making a dam.

Another innovation, sparked by one child’s interest in rock climbing, was a special rock wall for the children to climb. With authentic hand and foot holds, Ho set up a board in the yard for our own mini climbing wall. Andrew Z.’s father, Jared, demonstrated climbing gear and assisted children with a child-size harness. Our in-depth study was taking us to new heights.

Experimentation continued as we embarked on a long-term project polishing rocks. Children were eager to find out whether we could change regular rocks into the smooth and shiny ones that they admire. The rock tumbling machine—with its motor, moving parts, and rumbling sound—kept their attention as they helped replace the water, soap, and grit. Observing the subtle changes over time, the children expressed their theories about rocks.

OLIVIA D.: Rocks come from the beach and ocean. Water crashes into them and makes them medium and then small.
TALIA: Rocks wash down the river. They roll and get smaller.
ANDREW T.: Rocks come from all rivers, lakes, streams, and oceans. Sometimes it looks like a snail, but it is really a rock that looks like a snail.
VIJAY: Hot lava exploded out of the volcano. Then the hot lava

Matthew, Lauren, and Ashlyn examine rocks while water causes erosion. The two-tiered table brings the materials to a new level and encourages the experimentation.
runs down the mountain. There was a puddle of hot lava and then it turned into a rock.

Teachers wondered if this topic could lead to spontaneous play. When teacher Betsy Koning set up a table with tubes, pebbles, and water, the children engineered their version of a rock machine, so we knew that the theme was becoming their own.

Engineering a Rock-Water Machine

MAC: I’m connecting up all the tubes into a machine.
ANDY: Yeah, it’s a water machine.
BRANDON M.: It’s a rock cleaner.
ANDREW Z.: It’s also a water cleaner. It’s a filter. We’re cleaning dust out of the water.
JAKE: Then you should take the rocks out so you can put water in.
BRANDON M.: No, the rocks need to stay in too. They go in this pipe and water can go in the other.
ANDREW Z.: Actually, you can put both because the water isn’t solid so it can fit down in the little cracks between the rocks.
ARI: It’s cleaning water for sea turtles.

They need clean water to live.
ALEX: I need rocks in my cup, but I can’t see them.
ANDREW Z.: It’s because the water is cloudy from rock dust and that’s why we need to clean it out.
ANDREW G.: We clean out the rocks so they don’t have dust.

Rocks in literature serve as a strong base for learning and dramatic play.

Teachers introduced songs and stories such as Stone Soup, retold by Heather Forest; Sylvester and the Magic Pebble, by William Steig; The Salamander Room, by Ann Mazer; and Tillie and the Wall, by Leo Lionni. The children incorporated the storylines into their dramatic play.

Stone soup is always delicious, whether cooked in the sand or as a wonderful real vegetable soup.

The children continue to fine-tune their ability to investigate rocks through extensions of conventional curriculum.

Teacher Meghan Olsen scanned samples from the polished rock collection to create a matching game. Matching the actual rock to the life-size scanned image was difficult at times and required differentiation beyond what we had anticipated. The children looked closely for the attributes that distinguished the rocks from each other and developed their own schema for categorization. In other activities, the children created rock designs, conducted science experiments, and went on rock hunts. To extend the Discovering Rocks project to the children’s homes, an activity guide was developed to assist family members in creating their own rock hunt.

East AM has enjoyed this adventure of innovation and extending the curriculum. We invite you to look closely in nature and find a stone to start your own journey discovering rocks!

Photo not available online.

Two-Year-Olds Grow with Music

By Kittie Pecka, Head Teacher, M/W and T/Th afternoon Two’s

One of the most satisfying rewards of teaching 2-year-olds is witnessing their rapid growth. In addition to their physical and kinesthetic development, children’s verbal, social and musical abilities advance in the third year of life at a dizzying speed. Keeping pace with this growth is a challenge for parents and teachers, especially since not all children advance at the same rate. Music offers a solution to this challenge because it can foster each individual child’s verbal, kinesthetic and social skills without overwhelming him or her.

Music is part of our curriculum with young children because it is one of the earliest “intelligences” activated in the developing brain. We can attract children’s attention and help them focus through the use of musical accompaniment. Putting music to the important words we want to convey helps a child retain the words and the context. For example, the “Mulberry Bush” song has been used by mothers and caregivers to let children know that “this is the way” we do an activity.

Music also helps children adjust to a large group activity. With one voice, the children can express themselves in joyful song and movement that truly realizes the feeling of community. Both the vociferous, active child and the quiet one “singing” the words silently feel a sense of accomplishment, increase their vocabulary, and absorb the musical quality of the activity.

The musical qualities we emphasize in this age group are melody, rhythm and the feelings imparted by the words and music. Therefore, the goals are for the children to “think” the tunes (to silently go through the melodies in their heads), feel the rhythms and appreciate the emotional impact of the music.

In addition, musical activities in a group setting impart a common culture. Even children as young as 2 develop a repertoire of songs they love to share with family and friends. Often these songs become a part of their private play, consolidating vocabulary and melodies. Children extend that play to other areas of the brain, and are better able to calm themselves and focus in a way that promotes learning.

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Arriving at school, 3-year-old Adam rushes out to the sand area, only to find that a younger child is playing with his favorite truck. He snatches the toy from the clenched hands of the now-crying child.

Karin, age 2, sees a friend in a cart and joyfully shoves the cart forward. The friend is startled and enraged.

Very young children act on impulse, not insight. Although the will to play comes naturally at this age, empathy and social give-and-take do not. The youngest preschoolers, propelled entirely by inner drives, are in fact oblivious to the perspectives of others.

Watching hundreds of children at play, Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1896-1980) devised a theory of development explaining how they perceive the world differently at different stages and showing why, to a young child, “unproductive” social behaviors may make perfect sense. Children between 2 and 4 are beginning what Piaget called the pre-operational stage, focused on motor skills and objects—things they can touch and see. Pondering other children’s feelings and reactions is very difficult, said Piaget, because they haven’t yet mastered the logical thinking needed to appreciate someone else’s point of view. More time will be needed before they can grasp that others have ideas different from theirs, let alone the fact that others’ perspectives are as valid as their own.

The journey from egocentricity to empathy is important in cognitive as well as social development, Piaget noted. As children spend time under the warm guidance of adults in a carefully supervised, play-based environment, they acquire the kind of knowledge that helps them to consider their peers and to respect other members of their community.

Teachers at Bing thus view social conflicts as teachable moments. They observe play closely, trying to anticipate conflicts and debates. Then, rather than focus on what anyone is doing wrong, they help children unravel the origins of the clash and resolve it in a thoughtful way.

For instance, a teacher observing the tussle over the truck might say to the two children, “Adam, I can see that you want the same truck as she does. You can ask her for a turn by saying, ‘Can I have a turn?’” The teacher might then explain to the other child that she can choose to respond with either “Yes” or “When I’m finished.”

With Karin, the teacher might point out that the friend did not know he was suddenly going to get pushed and might not have wanted to be pushed at all. The teacher might also point out to the friend that Karin just wanted to play together, rather than to startle or upset him.

Once children begin to understand that other people have separate ideas, teachers can help them to communicate about conflict with constructive vocabulary and vocal tone, and to devise solutions of their own. (See We Can Solve This! on page 14.)

It takes a lot of practice and repeated experience, and sometimes many, many reminders, for young children to grow into social beings and learn to be part of the community. Nurturing this process takes an adult who’s skilled, attentive and above all, gentle. As developmental specialist Elinor Fitch Griffin wrote in her 1982 classic, Island of Childhood, “The aim is to teach children a way to resolve conflict...not to discover who is in the right or wrong or to make other judgments.”
Each year as spring approaches, teachers reflect upon the culture of their classroom and students, the individual needs of children and the philosophy of the school itself. On April 24, teachers attended a full day of workshops, which stimulated discussion, provided concrete information and aided them in this process of reflection.

The day began with a presentation by Ronald Mah, a licensed Marriage and Family therapist. Mah’s workshop, “Multi-culturalism and Diversity,” stimulated a lively discussion and dispelled many common misconceptions about what culture is and how to strive to create a multi-cultural environment. This led us to examine some of the founding principles of our school, such as our commitment to diversity, our belief in the abilities of all children and our respect for each child as an individual. In his discussion of how to create successful cross-cultural relationships, Mah reviewed the foundations of respect, understanding, empathy and connection. This led to a continuation of discussions throughout the following months and provided a stepping-stone for deeper reflection.

As a laboratory school, Bing is committed to supporting ongoing research in the field of child development. The researchers become part of the culture of the school and the teachers welcome the chance to hear an in-depth explanation of the research process. The following studies were examined: The Role Of Inhibition in Perspective Taking, The Preciseness of Children’s Imitations, The Absence of Shape Bias in Children’s Word Learning, and Individual Differences and Cognitive Flexibility in Preschool Children. Researchers Jamie Leach, Becky Williamson, Andrei Cimpian and Lisa Smythe each described the protocols they used in the game rooms, the responses they have received from children thus far, and how these results related to their original hypotheses.

The afternoon sessions focused on providing specific training in the area of speech and language development. One of the West Room parents, Mayra Leon Cramer, a pediatric speech and language pathologist, led an outstanding session aimed at helping teachers better understand the speech and language patterns of young children. She dispelled common misconceptions regarding speech production and communication, outlined typical speech development for children age 6 months to 3 years, and discussed how visual, motor, communication, social and play skills are closely connected with language development and learning. Furthermore, Cramer described the signs that may indicate problems such as hearing loss, social-emotional disorders or post-traumatic stress disorder, all of which could also result in speech issues.

The day ended with a choice of two music workshops by Bing teachers: Beginning Ukelele Instruction with Kitti Pecka and Exploring New Music Resource Materials with Beth Wise. The staff preparing to present for the upcoming Bing Parent Seminar Series met for a brainstorming session.

Visitors from Abroad

Left: Seventeen early childhood educators and administrators from Taiwan visit Bing Nursery School in November 2004. Right: Twelve educators from Singapore visit Bing in December 2004. Both groups shared their observations and exchanged ideas and educational practices with Bing teachers.
Teachers Share, Learn and Reconnect: Winter Staff Development Day
By Andrea Hart Rees, Teacher

The Bing teachers exchanged interesting information and dynamic conversation at Bing’s winter quarter Staff Development Day. The gathering provided opportunities to explore fresh ideas and methods to discuss them as a group, as well as to reconnect with our history, with our classrooms, and with one another as teachers.

Italian Inspiration The morning began with a video documentary, Not Just Anyplace, showing the evolution of a renowned municipal nursery school in the Northern Italian city of Reggio Emilia. (See Impressions of Reggio on page 24.) It all started with a group of parents building a preschool for their children after World War II. Under the leadership of Loris Malagucci, parents and teachers came together to discuss and debate the best way to satisfy the interests of parents and children. They posited that all children have the right to an exemplary educational experience beginning at a young age, and that the families with the greatest needs should be given the highest priority for placement in these schools. The community would be involved in major decisions and would support the schools. To fulfill these principles, the schools hired well-educated teachers who viewed children as strong, capable learners in need of guidance. To this day, the Reggio schools uphold the same high standards, and citizens do their best to fulfill the needs and rights of children and families.

Our Own Origins After the documentary, discussion of the 40-year history of Reggio Emilia quickly turned to Bing’s own 40-year history and how it affects what we are today. Teachers who count their time at Bing in decades shared thoughts about the school’s history with those who count their years at Bing on one hand.

One historical difference between Bing and Reggio is that Bing was built in part as a laboratory school for Stanford’s psychology department and was created to serve children of the faculty, staff and students as well as the general public. To make the school accessible for all families regardless of financial means, it also serves an outreach population. One of the school’s missions is to meet all of the physical, emotional, cognitive, social and communicative needs of young children. The school also offers training for undergraduate and graduate students. It was launched through support of many sources, including a grant from the National Science Foundation and a matching fund from Peter Bing and his mother Anna Bing Arnold.

Like the Reggio schools, Bing remains true to its roots, continuing to serve as a laboratory for research and student education, while providing excellent education to as many young children as possible in the Stanford community and beyond. It has also maintained its original educational approach, which resembles Reggio’s in a number of ways. Both programs employ caring, educated teachers who believe that children come to understand the world around them by perceiving and exploring their environment. As educators, we view ourselves as guides helping children to observe and understand the world, as well as one another. We are constantly learning better ways to help children tap into the resources around them and to understand one another.

We are also constantly observing children, trying to perceive the unique qualities of each, then sharing our observations with parents.

Although the staff conversation about our identity as a nursery school was called to conclusion when lunch had arrived, the feeling that we are still very much connected to the proud foundation set 40 years ago stayed with us much longer.

Breakout Time The day later provided an opportunity to examine compelling topics in early childhood education when teachers broke into small groups to discuss articles we had all read as background. Topics ranged from documentation of children’s experiences to the magic of everyday moments to the special rights of children with different needs. Teachers sat clustered around the staff’s patio table, around the children’s patio tables, even on the carpet of the story time areas, engrossed in intense but respectful debate. When we came back together, we took turns recapping our group discussions with the staff as a whole.

Teachers Quan Ho and Neely Zangenehzadeh work on classroom documentation in the newly renovated workroom.

Show and Tell We finished the day by sharing current developments from individual classes. Teachers showed photographs of their children engaged in activities, copies of stories told by children, and documents shared with parents about classroom events. After a day spent thinking about method, practice and theory, it was nice to return our focus to the children we know and love.
How can teachers promote young children’s understanding of mathematics through playing games? This is just one of the many things I learned from the 2004 annual NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) conference in Anaheim, California last November.

Each year an estimated 20,000 educators from around the nation attend the conference to learn, interact and exchange ideas. There were hundreds of sessions to choose from, with a variety of topics to suit the needs and interests of everyone. Twenty-two Bing teachers and administrators attended the conference, including five who made presentations.

This year I was particularly interested in three areas: how children relate to music kinesthetically, how children learn mathematics and how children combine literacy and expression. Veteran musician Ella Jenkins put on a performance that got the crowd bouncing in their seats. Hundreds of devotees filled the ballroom to chant, clap, move and sing along with Jenkins, who has been making music for children for over 50 years. Other sessions taught attendees new songs that could be used to learn coordination and balance.

Constance Kamii and a panel of researchers from Japan presented a two-hour session on mathematics and games. Kamii is an expert in general mathematics and Piaget’s theory of constructivism. She led a discussion about how common games can require some understanding of mathematical principles and how peer interaction should be encouraged in solving problems.

Another interesting presentation was a session with Rosemary Wells, the author and illustrator of the popular children’s book *Bunny Cakes*. Wells introduced her latest book, *My Kindergarten*, which follows a kindergarten class through an entire year. She stressed the importance of providing children with books every day to help them to grow and develop intelligently. She also spoke of the struggle to finance education, to which every child should have a right.

Besides attending workshops and sessions, I got a chance to wander around the expo, where the floor was covered with booths showcasing everything from story felts and books to children’s play equipment. I found some animal felts to use for music time and collected an assortment of information pamphlets.

Going to the NAEYC conference and expo in Anaheim allowed me to hear many unique and diverse voices and share in experiences that inspired me. It gave me a renewed respect for all professionals who work with young children. I was eager to share the newly acquired ideas and songs with the children at Bing.
Visiting the acclaimed municipal preschool programs in Reggio Emilia, three colleagues and I were struck by fundamental parallels between the Italian school and Bing.

On the October study tour of the municipal preschool system in the city of Reggio Emilia, Nandini Bhattacharjya, Andrea Hart Rees, Sarah Wright, and I joined 200 early childhood educators from around the world to listen to the Italian educators describe their history and approach. We visited five of the 33 affiliated nursery schools: one for infant-toddlers (asili nido) and four for 3- to 6-year-olds (scuole dell’infanzia).

Reggio Emilia is a small, affluent city that launched a municipal nursery school system 40 years ago in response to a postwar sociopolitical movement to raise the standards of early childhood care and education. Today, the innovative system is widely regarded as one of the finest in the world.

Six concepts guide its philosophy:
• The child as protagonist, collaborator and communicator
• The teacher as partner, nurturer, guide and researcher
• Cooperation as the foundation of the educational system
• The environment as the “third teacher”
• The parent as partner
• Documentation as communication

Study group discussions and lectures shed light on this philosophy, but it was seeing the actual schools—above all, the interactions among teachers, children and parents—that really crystallized our understanding of the pedagogy.

Core similarities between Reggio and Bing were unmistakable. Launched concurrently, both schools were influenced by the same trio of educational thinkers: John Dewey, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Respect for children and their ideas is paramount in both programs, with teachers viewed as co-constructors of knowledge. At Bing, we believe in “treating the child as an honored guest,” while in Reggio, it is said that “the child is worthy of being listened to.”

Both schools also share a thoughtfully set-up and aesthetically pleasing environment. The physical space of Bing was designed by renowned local architect Birge Clark (1893-1989), who worked closely with founding director Edith Dowley. Indoors and outdoors, the setting welcomes children to become engaged. Teachers think carefully about classroom materials: what to select, how to display it and how to create a provocation. Nature is woven seamlessly into the classrooms, with children moving freely between inside and out. Each classroom yard features a variety of trees and shrubs, carefully selected so that something is blooming all year long (see The Tree Project on page 12), and hills for rolling have been built to help enhance the child’s physical self.

In Reggio, the environmental setting functions as a “third teacher,” designed to encourage encounters, communication and relationships. Class materials and equipment have a fundamental order. Nature is integrated with the schools so that children can appreciate the physical environment. Classrooms are full of light, openness and transparency, as well as enticing smells wafting from the kitchen.

The essential element of time is central to both schools’ philosophies. Both believe that children need time to focus on an activity at a deep level. “We want to give back to children what modern society has taken away,” Dowley once said of Bing. In Reggio, the children we saw never seemed to be in a hurry. There, time is seen as a gift we need to give all children.

After many years of attending early childhood conferences and roundtables that discussed and examined the Reggio Emilia philosophy and culture, it was an opportunity of a lifetime to see and hear firsthand what makes the program so outstanding. I was inspired by its aesthetics and its commitment to children and families—and was constantly reminded that there are far more similarities than differences between our two cultures.

Impressions of Reggio: Viva la Similarity!
By Jennifer Winters, Assistant Director

Photo not available online.

Tom Hunter Concert at Bing
Bing Nursery School hosted a family concert featuring folk singer and song writer Tom Hunter on September 24, 2004. Picnicking on the hill of the Center yard, Bing children and families enjoyed a lively concert.

Photo not available online.
"Is my child ready?" Parents often ask this question as their children near kindergarten age. Many worry not only about their child’s readiness, but also about their choice of school.

Bing Nursery School annually hosts a Kindergarten Information Night for parents. Last January, a panel of experts helped ease parents’ anxieties and answered questions regarding readiness. The panelists were Dr. Rick Lloyd, a pediatrician at the Palo Alto Medical Foundation; Susan Charles, principal of Ohlone Elementary, an alternative public school in Palo Alto; Beth Wise, Bing head teacher, music specialist and former kindergarten teacher; Karen Robinette, teacher and former elementary school teacher; and Peckie Peters, head teacher and former kindergarten teacher.

Q Is my child mature enough to start kindergarten, or should we wait a year?
A number of parents whose children are officially kindergarten-eligible decide to hold off for a year, especially if the child won’t turn 5 until fall. Those “held back” are more often boys than girls, Dr. Rick Lloyd observed. He and Susan Charles cautioned that parents who consider putting off kindergarten think carefully about their reasons for doing so. There should be multiple issues to hold a kindergarten-eligible child back from kindergarten, said Charles. One disadvantage of waiting, she noted, is that children who start later will be among the oldest in their classes and may reach puberty earlier than their peers, leading to some social awkwardness. On the other hand, some children simply aren’t kindergarten-ready. A preschool-age child who truly needs another year of development will display a consistent pattern that is of concern, said Charles. Examples might include a child who has difficulty sitting in a group for a sustained period of time, or one who has made no progress in interacting or communicating with other children for the past year and is constantly seen “playing parallel” with his/her peers instead of associating with them directly.

Q Which school is right for my child—and for me?
Charles advised parents to shop around, if possible, for a school that reflects their ideals, values and principles. It is important to visit prospective schools and talk to the teachers and the administration. School selection is usually the parents’ personal decision, Charles noted. Children are amazingly adaptive, she said; it’s usually the parents who most need to be comfortable about their choice. Questions such as “What would work for you and your family?” are asked, and parents need to trust their own instincts, because they know their child best. When parents are happy with a school, their children are likely to feel the same. Just remember that each child is different and has his/her own abilities and interests.

Q Which is better: full-day or half-day?
Peckie Peters cited research suggesting that children in full-day kindergarten do not do any better than those attending half-days. Parents who choose full-day kindergarten might just want to make sure that their children have more play activities than academics in the afternoons. Those choosing half-days might want to ask, “How will my child spend the rest of the day?” In either case, it is important to remember to enjoy your child. Bonnie Chandler, a longtime Bing teacher, cautioned families not to over-program kindergartners with too many activities. As parents, we need to kick back, relax and be with our children, she said. They need plenty of free time outside of school, asserted Charles, or they’ll be robbed of their childhood. Let them come home and play, she advised. Have fun with them! And, most important, believe in them. Have confidence in your child!

Q How can I soothe my child's anxieties about kindergarten?
It’s not unusual for preschool-age children to feel anxious about going off to kindergarten. It’s best, therefore, to put off major discussions of kindergarten with your child until the start date nears, and not bring it up when the change is still a long way off, said Karen Robinette. Let the children enjoy their time at Bing School; let them enjoy the moment. When it’s time to talk about kindergarten, focus on the positive and emphasize that school will be fun. Be attentive also to your own emotions: the better you feel about your child going to school, the better he or she will feel about it, too. Beth Wise suggested encouraging children to look forward to kindergarten by pointing out the similarities to preschool, such as easels and blocks, and emphasizing new opportunities, such as making more friends, having their own bookbag, and enjoying recess. By September, said Peters, most will be ready for the change. The tremendous inner growth they experience at this age will have prepared them for the next step forward in their lives.
**Bing Children’s Fair**

What did you like best at the Bing Fair?

Everything! – Kimi Ann

Working at the bake sale with my mom. – Mia

I like the sand. I make myself all dirty. – Charlotte

I like the challenge course. I won a ribbon. – Alex

I liked fishing, and it was the first thing. It was number one on the map of the fair. – Ben

I like the challenge course, and my dad’s favorite was the puppet show. – Andrew Z.

My favorite is the duck pond. I won two froggies because I went twice. – Maia

I liked the big, huge mountain of sand and the puppet show with the frog. – Vijay

Grandma Edie brought me to the Bing Fair. – Chloe

I liked fishing. I got three frogs and a fish. – Lorenzo

I liked the watermelon. My mom took me there. – Dylan

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**Back to Bing Night**

Back to Bing Night is an event for Bing parents to meet teachers and other parents and to receive information about school events and fund-raisers. Many parents participated in the second Back to Bing Night in 2004.

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**Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work at Stanford**

Bing Nursery School participated as a site for the “Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work at Stanford” event on April 28, 2005. Eight workshop attendees, including Bing alumna, Sinclair (5th from left and inset), spent a morning at Bing. Some built with blocks; some played musical games with children; some read books at snack time. The attendees also learned about current research at Bing from researcher Rebecca Williamson.
An all-American extravaganza celebrating “Red, White and Bing” reaped more than $240,000 as last fall’s Harvest Moon auction marked the 16th annual benefit dedicated to the Bing Nursery School Scholarship Fund.

Fresh flowers and floating balloons of red, white and blue filled the spacious foyer of Stanford’s Arrillaga Alumni Center, where a down-home banjo band played as bidders perused a dazzling array of items to be auctioned off. Adding further sparkle to the event was Stanford’s student spirit squad, the Dollies.

Bing is one of only a few nursery schools of its kind in the country to fund a substantial scholarship program, providing financial aid to more than 20 percent of its families. This program makes possible diversity and outreach—an important part of Bing’s mission, enriching the experience of everyone at the school.

The 2004 benefit raised $240,000, including a generous gift of $50,000 from Helen and Peter Bing. Its success reflected the dedication and hard work of hundreds of parent volunteers who spent countless hours soliciting auction donations, picking up items, tracking, packing and moving the inventory, assembling gift baskets, corresponding with donors, putting together great entertainment, decorating and setting up the hall, checking guests in and out, monitoring finances and tickets—and, of course, cleaning up!

Warren Packard and Bob Burlinson were auctioneers extraordinaire, engaging everyone in the live bidding. Featured items included such unique offerings as a tour of IDEO’s toy invention lab and the chance to create your own toy, plus vacations ranging from a dude ranch in Wyoming to a ski resort in Switzerland and local getaways ranging from a weekend in Palm Desert to one perfect night in Napa. There were rare wines and breathtaking jewelry and many special event sign-ups, including wine tastings, campouts, tea parties, even a nostalgic bash celebrating the ‘80s.

We extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to all who donated, volunteered, attended and participated, and we look forward to seeing everyone again at the next auction as we kick off the school’s 40th anniversary in 2006.

Special recognition goes to two individuals who went far above and beyond the call of duty—specifically, auction co-chairs Catherine Raffa and Jaspi Sandhu—and to the auction committee chairs, whose efforts never ceased from start to finish.

2004-2005 Annual Fund Report

Thanks to the contributions of Bing parents, friends and our staff members, we were able to raise $338,000 during the annual fund year September 1, 2004 through August 31, 2005. The participation of our current Bing families reached 56 percent. In 2005-2006, we are striving for 100 percent participation!

The annual fund is an important part of the school budget. We depend on the fund to support the additional assistant teachers in each classroom, scholarships for children who would otherwise be unable to attend the school, the specialists, and staff development. No gift is too small or too large. Our goal is for every family to participate in supporting the school. Please help us continue the level of excellence that makes Bing such a special place for our children. A big thank you to all.

Auction Committee Chairs

Auction Co-Chair Jaspi Sandhu
Auction Co-Chair Catherine Raffa
Solicitation Co-Chair Mara Wallace
Solicitation Co-Chair Nicole Thom
Graphic Design Jean Zambelli
Bulletin Board Team Jennifer Simoni
Display Laurie Quinn
Data Entry Melissa Jordan
Correspondence Maureen Ekedahl
Creative Writing Laura Ehrig
Inventory Connie Jagolinzer
Class Gifts Jeff Hickman
Decorations Rosario Breach
Food and Beverage Gudrun Enger
Entertainment Kathy Fitzgerald
Finance Randy Joss
Parent Liaison Tina Molumphy
Set-up Ashley Waltemath
Check-in Ivonne Merrin
Check-out Julianne Price
Ticket Trackers Jackie Macdonald
Runners Cami Wisowaty
Packers and Movers Dana Wohlgemuth
Winners Circle Allyson Ceadle
Clean-up Ira Lit
Bing Nursery School’s 40th Anniversary 1966–2006
Celebration and Symposium
“Towards a Deeper Understanding of the Development of the Young Child”

SATURDAY, JUNE 3, 2006
Bing School children, alumni, and families—and all friends of Bing—are invited to join us in celebrating continued excellence in early childhood education and the advancement of scientific research to further our understanding of children’s growth and development while enhancing learning for undergraduate and graduate students at Stanford University.

9:00am-12:00pm
Research Symposium in the Department of Psychology at Jordan Hall

2:00-4:00pm
Garden Party Reunion at Bing Nursery School

Please join us!

“Being a laboratory for child study means providing an outstanding nursery school where parents, teachers, students and researchers alike strive to discover and to employ the best ways to promote children’s learning and development. It encourages an approach to curriculum that is open and experimental. Teachers think about how children learn and how to make sure children are thinking and solving problems as they play and explore. It is exciting to be involved in a laboratory setting, and a challenge always to be looking at things afresh.”

—Jeanne W. Lepper, Director